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Power Surge by Congress

By BERNARD WEINRAUB

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WASHINGTON, Sept. 8 — For the first time in Ronald Reagan's Presidency, Congress has abruptly seized the initiative on foreign policy matters and has placed the White House on the

News politically charged issues,
Analysis White House and Congressional officials say.

Mr. Reagan's announcement, scheduled for Monday, on his plans for some economic sanctions against South Africa is a reluctant bow to Congressional pressure and comes after considerable debate within the White House.

On Saturday Mr. Reagan responded to aggressive bipartisan Congressional pressure to limit foreign imports by announcing moves against several major American allies for "unfair trading practices."

These actions — coupled with earlier compromises with Congress on non-military aid to Nicaraguan rebels, the limit of 50 MX nuclear missiles to be deployed in existing silos and the trims in the increase in military spending — are a major departure from relations with Congress in Mr. Reagan's first term.

After dominating Congress in his first term, and triumphantly securing his campaign pledges for a tax cut, a steep military buildup and slashes in social spending, Mr. Reagan and his aides now find themselves compromising on foreign policy, even adjusting their ideological positions, in the face of an increasingly independent Congress.

Posture of Unconcern

"It is very disturbing to us," a key White House official said today. "Realistically, foreign policy is going to be the most confrontational area we'll have."

Publicly, the White House brushes aside Mr. Reagan's compromises. "You name me one year when the President did not include political compromise as one of the tools in his bag,"

said Rusty Brashear, a deputy press secretary. "The fact still remains that the President has accomplished more than any other President in recent years."

At this point, though, White House officials plainly view the scheduled meeting in November in Geneva between Mr. Reagan and Mikhail S. Gorbachev, the Soviet leader, as a pivotal moment in the Presidency and Mr. Reagan's relations with Congress. Not only will the meeting enable the White House to portray him as a man of peace, officials say, but the meeting, if reasonably successful, could recapture the foreign policy initiative.

In the meantime, White House officials are grappling with the situation of a President who remains highly popular as measured by national polls, but who faces a Congress that is increasingly dominating the foreign policy agenda. What concerns the White House is not only the relative loss of control over foreign policy, but the possibility that this could extend to domestic policies, especially in the Administration's tax overhaul proposals.

Concern about the uncertain way Mr. Reagan's second term seems to be evolving, the high-level staff friction within the White House and the President's fractious relations with Congress on foreign policy was underscored when Mr. Reagan and his wife, Nancy, recently spent several hours at their Santa Barbara ranch talking privately to Stuart Spencer. Aides say the long-time political adviser discussed the President's control of the public policy agenda. Mrs. Reagan reportedly played a role in arranging the meeting.

Moves by Congress

Congress has been able to seize the foreign policy initiative for several reasons, according to Administration and Congressional aides.

The first, they say, is the emergence of Senators Richard G. Lugar, the chairman of the Foreign Relations Committee, and Bob Dole, the majority leader, as powerful, somewhat independent forces on Capitol Hill.

Mr. Lugar took over a committee whose status and leverage had declined in recent years and is determined, aides say, to give the panel the same voice and leverage that it had in the 1960's under J. William Fulbright, the Democratic Senator from Arkansas.

Accordingly, Mr. Lugar played a central role in shaping the first foreign aid authorizations bill since 1961. He also worked out a compromise in which \$27 million in aid to Nicaraguan rebels could not be administered by the Central Intelligence Agency or the Defense Department, as the White House sought, and after some intense bargaining with liberals and black Democrats, achieved a compromise sanctions proposal against South Africa. Mr. Reagan appears to have reluctantly adopted many of the provisions of the sanctions bill.

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